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18 December 1969

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

Morning Meeting of 18 December 1969

DD/I briefed from a Joint Assessment of the most recent KH-4 mission. In response to the Director's question he noted that it was a CORONA shot.

D/ONE briefed on State's exceptions to NIE 97-1-69, Prospects for Peru.

D/ONE called attention to the photograph of a mammoth tanker contained in the magazine Chevron Bulletin.

DD/S reported that pay checks will be distributed on 24 December. He went on to brief on the number of office parties to be held on specific dates and commented that appropriate measures are being taken by the Office of Security. Executive Director observed that, although this may be the first time we have tabulated the number of parties, there is nothing particularly unusual about this year as compared to previous years.

Carver reported that [] will be briefing the scientific panel mentioned at yesterday's Morning Meeting. Carver went on to brief on the logistical flow, the aftermath of rumors that there might be a coup [] and other matters pertaining to Vietnam.

*Maury reported that Congressman Riegle wishes to be briefed before Christmas on infiltration. After some discussion the Director

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asked Maury to bring this problem to the attention of Bryce Harlow or William Timmons if Maury determines that Mr. Timmons handles the House account in Mr. Harlow's office. In this connection, the Director called attention to a recent paper from [] on how to handle mail addressed to the White House. The Director noted that he feels he saw mentioned that Mr. Timmons in Bryce Harlow's office is the person to be contacted on matters pertaining to the House.

Bross briefed on his session yesterday with Andrew Marshall and described Mr. Marshall's job as being an adviser of sorts to Dr. Kissinger on what intelligence the President should see. Bross commented he told Mr. Marshall that D/ONE would be glad to see him but made it clear that Mr. Marshall's job is yet to be defined.

DD/P noted that Vang Pao was apparently caught off guard in the Plaine des Jarres, as reported in a recently received cable, and suffered a serious military setback.

The Director called attention to the piece by Joseph Kraft in today's Washington Post, and a brief discussion followed on the derivation of the material contained in the column.

[]
L. K. White

*Extracted and sent to action officer

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Joseph Kraft

President's Secret Good Guy Has Ambitions for High Office



AS THE NIXON administration shapes up its basic foreign and domestic choices for next year, it is increasingly apparent that there is a secret good guy operating behind the scenes. He turns out to be, of all people, Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird.

Laird's influence, already felt on Vietnam, will probably be the make or break factor in the defense budget and the eventual American position on arms control. And his role is the more interesting in that, unlike previous defense secretaries, he has well-founded ambitions for the highest offices in the land.

The defense secretary is condemned to hide his enlightenment under a bushel by reason of his immediate constituency. He lives cheek by jowl with the uniformed military in the Pentagon, and their tribunes in the Armed Services committees of the Congress. His power base in the Republican Party, as reflected in his position as chief platform drafter for the convention that nominated Barry Goldwater, is with the far right.

With those kind of friends, Laird has not surprisingly made lots of hard-line noises. In the fight over the ABM, he whipped up a big alarm about a Soviet move to develop a "first-strike" capacity against this country with the SS-9 missile. He has not publicly come out against any of the weapons systems so dear to the military. But, unpublicly, Laird has been edging away very skilfully from his hard-line constituency.

HE WAS the chief man in the administration pushing for draft reform and renunciation of chemical and biological weapons. He prevailed upon Chairman Mendel Rivers of the House Armed Services Committee to call off what looked like an absolutely horrendous

"investigation" into the My Lai massacre. And in ways so complicated as to be almost invisible, he has been pushing for getting out of Vietnam and winding down the defense budget.

On Vietnam, Laird has been the chief architect of the withdrawal policy, and he has been constantly pushing the President for a faster pullout. Early in the year, he forced the President by announcing in advance the President's withdrawal announcements. More recently he has developed an even more artful device—a declaration that he is going ahead with withdrawals on a regular schedule; the implication being there is that the President's quarterly announcements merely punctuate a process that is under way anyhow.

As to the defense budget, Laird has accepted the principle of review by a committee chaired by Henry Kissinger of the White House staff, and including Under Secretary Elliot Richardson of the State Department, Director Richard Helms of the Central Intelligence Agency and Director Robert Mayo of the Budget Bureau. To his Pentagon audience, Laird explains that this Defense Budget Review committee gives him the support of the State Department in fighting drastic cuts in this country's foreign commitment.

In fact, the function of the committee is to strengthen the cutting hand of Budget Director Mayo. For Mayo can no longer be downed by the favorite Pentagon argument that defense is more important than economics. To the logic of the budget, Mayo now adds the logic of a coherent strategy as represented by Dr. Kissinger, in effect, legitimizes Mayo's authority in the defense field. Thus it happened that a prototype of the Budget Re-

view committee forced Laird to accept — kicking and screaming, of course — the abandonment of the Air Force's \$5 billion project for a Manned Orbiting Laboratory in space. And in the same way big cuts are probably going to be forced in the Navy's carrier program, in the tactical wings of the Air Force, and in the Army's program for a new battle tank.

Laird's biggest test is probably going to come with the end of the first stage of arms limitation talks in Helsinki. For the United States went to the Helsinki talks with a series of possible positions — the "building blocks" of arms control, as White House staff members are prone to say.

WHAT THAT means is that the basic internal decisions that have to be made before hard positions can be taken have not yet been made in this country. If the Soviet Union proves responsive to the American overtures, as now seems certain, then the big choices about what weapons to freeze and how and when will have to be faced. And at that time the man that will have to carry the day against the certain pressure of the military is the secretary of defense.

Nobody can yet say how Laird will go. But the odds are strong for a position that goes well beyond the interest of his narrow constituency. For Laird, after all, has a keen incentive to broaden his base. He did not give up a highly promising career in the Congress just to be saluted as secretary of defense. He has it in him to be the Republican nominee for president in 1976. Depending on circumstance, he might even be the nominee for vice president in 1972. The President could do—in